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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to: (1) conduct an empirical examination of applicant reactions to faculty jobs described in recruitment advertisements for business faculty vacancies at community colleges; and (2) assess factors that potentially impact applicant decisions to apply for and pursue position vacancies. The results of this study have implications for community college officials attempting to recruit business professionals from MBA programs into community college business departments. This study's findings suggest that the initial attraction of applicants to a community college job is highest when the applicant's current job satisfaction is low, relocation is not required, recruiter and applicant backgrounds are similar, and spousal contribution to household income is low. This study finds that significant numbers of community college faculty have declined the extrinsic awards of the private sector in favor of intrinsic rewards of a community college teaching career. Thus, one strategy of a program designed to teach at a community college should be to concentrate on intrinsic attributes of the job such as job satisfaction. Another possible recruitment strategy suggested by the findings of this research is to use a recruiter who shares a common background with the target applicants. The finding that applicants rated the job more favorably when spousal contribution to household income was small was unexpected. (Contains 25 references.) (VWC)

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Community College Recruitment: An Analysis of Applicant Reactions

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Abstract

Personnel recruitment is becoming increasingly important to community colleges because many faculty are retiring. Randomly selected applicants for community college business faculty vacancies reacted to formal recruitment advertisements. Applicant attraction to the job was highest when (a) applicant current job satisfaction was low, (b) relocation was not required, (c) recruiter and applicant backgrounds were similar, and (d) spousal contribution to household income was low.

Community College Recruitment: An Analysis of Applicant Reactions

Few empirical studies (Winter, 1996, 1998) about community college faculty recruitment appear in the existing literature. However, despite the lack of such empirical research, community college educators agree that faculty recruitment is among the most important duties undertaken by community college administrators. The quality of the educational programs depends on the skills and abilities of the personnel hired to fill faculty vacancies: "Matching the best person with each open position should be a high priority" (Janzen, 1994, p. 208). Also, as Lawhon and Ennis (1995) have observed: "Recruiting and selecting faculty members is a challenging, expensive, and time-consuming task for 2-year institutions" (p. 349). Further, faculty recruitment is a pressing issue at present because there is high turnover within the national cadre of community college faculty, "primarily as a result of retirement" (Higgins, Hawthorn, Cape, & Bell, 1994, p. 27). Murray (1999) describes the immediate impact of this turnover as follows: "Administrators will have an opportunity to influence their institutions' futures by hiring the largest cohort of faculty employed at one time since the 1960s" (p. 41).

The operational definition of recruitment adopted for this research was the one developed by Breaugh (1992): "Employee recruitment involves those organizational activities that (1) influence the number and/or types of applicants who apply for a

position and/or (2) affect whether a job offer is accepted" (p. 4). The stage of recruitment serving as the focus for this research was the task of generating an adequate applicant pool from which finalists for the job can be selected. The applicant pool stage is critical to organizations because the hiring effort will fail if the individuals targeted for recruitment do not apply for the position (Rynes, 1991; Rynes, Heneman, & Schwab, 1980). The recruitment practice examined in this study was the formal faculty recruitment advertisement, a recruitment practice routinely used by community college officials in local print media, education journals, and national education print media such as Community College Times and The Chronicle of Higher Education (Gibson-Benninger & Ratcliff, 1996; Lawhon & Ennis, 1995).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to (a) conduct an empirical examination of applicant reactions to faculty jobs described in recruitment advertisements for business faculty vacancies at community colleges and (b) assess factors that potentially impact applicant decisions to apply for and pursue position vacancies. Another objective was to respond to a research call (Rynes, 1991) for research about applicant decisions, such as the decision to apply for the job, that occur prior to the initial employment interview: "most recruitment research has been conducted subsequent to the first employment interview [and] as such, little is known about the determinants of job application behaviors" (p. 435).

Methods

This study had features of both the correlation design and the experimental design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). The correlation feature of the study was the use of stepwise multiple regression to develop a predictive equation of factors that influence applicant reactions to formal recruitment advertisements. The experimental feature of the study was to have the study participants take part in a simulated recruitment exercise (explained later) intended to assess applicant reactions to two experimentally manipulated variables: recruiter background and job relocation.

Participants

Randomly selected business professionals (N = 176) completing MBA degrees at a large university in the Midwest rated experimentally manipulated recruitment advertisements for business faculty vacancies at a community college. Having these individuals serve as participants was an externally valid procedure because community college officials routinely recruit faculty from the graduate programs of four-year institutions and from business and industry (Higgins et al., 1994). Also, the participants had the two essential job qualifications needed to serve as community college faculty: job experience in the profession and a master's degree in the relevant discipline (Higgins et al., 1994; London, 1989).

The research site is located in a state with 14 community colleges and within a metropolitan area with a population of approximately 1 million people. The participants role-played as

applicants for community college business faculty positions that either required relocation within the state or did not require relocation. This recruitment context was realistic because community college recruitment is frequently a local or statewide endeavor rather than a national one (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Lawhon & Ennis, 1995). The recruitment simulation required the job applicants to: (a) complete a biographical data sheet; (b) review a business faculty position described in a recruitment advertisement manipulated according to job relocation (yes, no) and according to the recruiter's background which was either similar (business) or dissimilar (education) to that of the applicant; and (c) complete a job evaluation instrument.

Prior to role-playing as job applicants, the participants responded to the following item on the biographical data sheet: "Upon completion of your MBA degree, how willing are you to consider teaching in your specialty at a community college?" This item had a 7-point Likert-type scale (7 being more favorable than 1). The mean rating (M = 4.82) for the above item was above the midpoint on the scale, suggesting that the participants had at least moderate interest in considering a job teaching business at a community college. This level of willingness to consider the job lent further realism to the recruitment simulation in that it was realistic for the participants to role-play as job applicants because they had reported at least moderate willingness to consider a faculty position prior to the simulation exercise. Descriptive data for the study participants appear in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Independent Variables

The biographical data sheet described earlier captured information about 11 personal characteristics of the simulated job applicants: age, gender, race, marital status, percent of household income earned by the spouse, number of relatives in the area, number of dependent children, years lived in the area, number of friends in the area, current job satisfaction, and years of business experience. Personal characteristics were a focus in this research because applicant characteristics are known to be salient influences on such applicant behaviors as deciding to apply for the job and accepting an initial employment interview (Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Rynes et al., 1980).

Content of simulated recruitment advertisements operationalized two variables central to this study. Each announcement indicated whether the job required relocation to another region of the state (yes, no). Relocation was a variable of interest because empirical research conducted in the private sector (Noe & Barber, 1993; Noe, Steffy & Barber, 1988) has demonstrated the importance to recruitment outcomes of applicant willingness to accept job mobility. However, despite the demonstrated importance of job mobility, this factor has received virtually no attention in research about recruitment for educational organizations such as community colleges.

Each advertisement also required that application be made either to a recruiter described as having a background similar to that of the applicant (MBA degree, job experience in business) or to a recruiter described as having a background dissimilar to that of the applicant (master's degree in education, job experience in teaching high school business education). Faculty with both backgrounds are commonly recruited to teach business at community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Higgins et al., 1994). Recruiter background was a research focus because tests of Byrne's similarity-attraction hypothesis (Byrne, 1971) have shown that job applicants are attracted to recruiters (and to jobs) when the applicant and the recruiter share similar personal characteristics or attitudes. Conversely, applicants are less attracted to recruiters (and to jobs) when the applicant and the recruiter are dissimilar relative to personal characteristics or attitudes. A successful test of Byrne's hypothesis appears in the public school recruitment literature (Young, Place, Rinehart, Jury, & Baits, 1997). This investigation was a tentative step towards establishing the relevance of similarity-dissimilarity effects to community college recruitment.

The participants were assigned at random to review one of four versions of a recruitment advertisement created by the 2 x 2 crossing of relocation and recruiter background. Other advertisement content, held constant across all versions of the advertisement, included: (a) general information about the statewide community college system such as the fact the 14 colleges in the system deliver instruction "across a wide array

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of academic disciplines including business administration and business technology"; (b) information about required job duties, such classroom instruction and student advisement; and (c) instructions about how to apply for the job. The advertisement content was based on actual content of recruitment advertisements placed in such educational media as Community College Times.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable was applicant rating of a faculty job described in a recruitment advertisement. The measure for the dependent variable was an additive composite score composed of ratings on 5-point Likert-type scales (5 being more favorable than 1) for the following four items: (a) overall attractiveness of the job, (b) likelihood of applying for the job, (c) likelihood of accepting an interview if offered, and (d) likelihood of accepting the job if offered. These items had been used in previous recruitment research conducted in the private sector (Barber, 1998; Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber, 1990) and the education sector (Winter, 1997). As assessed by coefficient alpha, the reliability of the composite score was .94, which greatly exceeded the minimum (.60) recommended for use of a composite score in statistical analysis (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Results

The stepwise multiple regression procedure revealed four significant predictors of applicant rating of a business faculty position. The regression results appear in Table 2. The most

Insert Table 2 about here

significant predictor was the applicant's current job satisfaction (increment in R-squared = .484), with applicant rating of the job increasing as current job satisfaction decreased. Applicant rating of the job also increased as the percentage of household income earned by the spouse decreased. No other personal characteristics were statistically significant.

Recruiter background (business = 1, education = 2) and relocation (yes = 1, no = 2) were dummy coded to provide metric representation for these experimentally manipulated factors. The beta coefficients in Table 2 indicate that applicant rating of a business faculty job was more favorable when the background of the recruiter was similar (business) to that of the applicant and the job did not require relocation. As assessed by adjusted R-squared, the four significant predictors explained 52.4% of the variance in applicant rating of a business faculty position, a magnitude of explanation that falls within a range characterized by Cohen and Cohen (1983) as "high".

Discussion

The topic of this study, the reactions of applicants to jobs described in recruitment media, has received much attention in the private sector and in the public education sector, but has received almost no attention in the community college sector. It is important to address this void in community college research because recruitment is a vital issue for community college

officials at this time. Many faculty are retiring and effective recruitment programs are crucial to filling faculty vacancies. A focus on applicant reactions to recruitment practices such as the formal position announcement is also important because, as Barber (1998) has noted, "it is the decisions of applicants (or potential applicants) that, in the aggregate, determine the effectiveness of recruitment" (p. 7). The recruitment practice addressed in this research, the formal recruitment advertisement, deserves attention because the recruitment advertisement is one of the practices used most frequently to generate an applicant pool for community college faculty vacancies. Such advertisements "are placed [by community college officials] in specific journals and newsletters commonly read by those seeking positions" (Lawhon & Ennis, 1995, p. 351).

The results of this study have implications for community college officials attempting to recruit business professionals from MBA programs into community college business departments. Findings suggest that the initial attraction of applicants to a community college job is influenced greatly by the applicant's current job satisfaction. This information is useful to community college recruiters because job satisfaction is an intrinsic rather than an extrinsic attribute of the job (Lawler, 1973; Steers & Porter, 1983) and because, as explained below, evidence exists that community college faculty, as professionals, are intrinsically motivated.

Although community colleges cannot compete with private business relative to such extrinsic job attributes as salary,

community college survey research (Higgins et al., 1994, p. 32) has revealed that many faculty are attracted by intrinsic facets of the job such as "opportunities for career advancement and professional growth" and "the attractive environment of the college campus." Further, when community college faculty were asked what they would be doing if they had not chosen to teach at a community college, the majority said they would be "trainers or consultants in business and industry, with many noting the more lucrative nature of such work as compared to college teaching" (Higgins et al., 1994, p. 33). This finding indicates significant numbers of community college faculty have declined the extrinsic rewards of the private sector in favor of the intrinsic rewards of a community college teaching career. Thus, one strategy of a program designed to recruit business professionals from MBA programs to teach at a community college should be to concentrate on intrinsic attributes of the job such as job satisfaction. Intrinsic job attributes, such as the job satisfaction derived from teaching, can be emphasized in position announcements, job description mailings, recruitment videos, and recruitment interviews as a means of increasing applicant attraction to the job.

Another possible recruitment strategy suggested by the findings of this research is to use a recruiter who shares a background in common with the target applicants. In this study, applicant reaction to the job was most favorable when the applicant and the recruiter shared the same business background (MBA degree, business experience). The similarity-attraction

manipulation in this investigation was further enhanced in that the recruiter who was similar to the applicants had made the same career transition (business to community college teaching) that the study participants would have to make.

Finally, the finding that applicants rated the job more favorably when the spouse's contribution to household income was small rather than large was unexpected. Although survey research suggests faculty are motivated by intrinsic job attributes rather than by extrinsic job attributes such as income, one would still expect spousal contribution to household income to be a positive correlate of applicant job attraction rather than a negative correlate. Before making practical application of this finding, replication studies should be conducted to determine if there are intervening variables that account for the negative impact of spousal contribution to household income on job attraction.

In conclusion, the personnel hired to teach at the nation's community colleges will have a decisive impact on the future success of community colleges. Although effective faculty hiring begins with generating an adequate applicant pool for each vacancy, the task of identifying the determinants of applicant job attraction has barely begun. It is hoped that this research will stimulate greater attention to faculty recruitment and, thereby, contribute to the future excellence of educational programs at the nation's community colleges.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Participants

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Age	30.5	5.9	21-57
Gender	(a)	(a)	(a)
Race	(b)	(b)	(b)
Marital Status	(c)	(c)	(c)
Number of Relatives	8.4	9.9	0-40
Number Dep. Children	.9	1.1	0-5
Years in Area	16.1	12.0	1-48
Number of Friends	14.4	10.8	0-50
Years of Business Experience	6.1	5.5	1-30
Job Satisfaction	3.6	2.1	1-7

(a) Female (n = 79), Male (n = 97)

(b) White (n = 157), Minority (n = 19)

(c) Married (n = 115), Single (n = 61),

N = 176

Table 2

Stepwise Regression of Applicant Reaction on Predictor Variables

Predictor Variable	Beta Coefficient	*t* Value	Increment in *R*-Squared
Job Satisfaction	-.65	-11.68 **	.484
Spousal % of Household Income	-.15	-2.89 *	.019
Recruiter	-.15	-2.70 *	.019
Relocation	.12	2.19 *	.013

N = 176

R-Squared = .535 [*F* (4, 171) = 49.202, *p* < .001]

Adjusted *R*-Squared = .524

* *p* < .01. ** *p* < .001